Background, Sources, and Tradition

Socrates was embraced by Arab culture in the Middle Ages as the paradigm of the moral sage rather than as a philosopher in the strict sense of the word. His image rested upon two classes of material: Plato on the one hand and subsequent authors on the other. Regarding this first source, there is written evidence for the existence of Arabic translations of some of Plato’s writings, especially the *Phaedo* (Bürgel 1974: 117, 101), *Timaeus, Laches*, and *Meno*, which are quoted especially by al-Birūnī (d. 1034) and reported in Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s writings, as well as by those of al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik (e.g. 95, 1). Among the second class of materials there may at least be a partial contribution from the Cynic school (Rosenthal 1940: 388), perhaps transmitted to the Arab world via Indian sources. Even so, other Hellenistic works certainly found their way into Arabic tradition: Xenophon is quoted as are other authors such as Ammonius and Porphyry; Diogenes Laertius and pseudo-epigraphic writings like *Liber de Pomo* also served as direct sources for the Arabic Socrates tradition. However, in addition to complete texts it seems plausible that a certain Greek gnomic collection also existed that served the Syrians and/or the Arabs as a source for their knowledge.

As viewed from the medieval Arabic perspective, the route of the Socratic tradition went roughly as depicted in fig. 20.1. The model that Socrates provided was earnestly appreciated by the Arabs of the Middle Ages. The admiration expressed in their stories is manifest even in texts that are almost direct translations from the Greek (e.g. Ibn al-Qiftī, 205, 4) – its keenness perceptible simply from the titles of various writings. al-Kindi, usually thought of as the first Arab philosopher (d. 873 ce), wrote a number of treatises about Socrates, most of which are now lost: *On the Virtue of Socrates; Socrates’ Pronouncements; On a Controversy Between Socrates and Archigenes; Of Socrates’s Death; About What Took Place Between Socrates and the Harraneans* (Ibn Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 260, 4; Ibn al-Qiftī, 374, 5). Furthermore, another early important scientific and philosophic personality, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (d. 789), demonstrated a focused interest in the sage, composing a treatise entitled *Critical Remarks on Socrates* (in Kraus 1942–3: 64) – later, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 950) would write a work of the same name. Although not
frequently, sayings attributed to Socrates were quoted in Arabic poetry (‘Abbas 1977: 97) and were even inscribed on a public edifice in Samarqand (Shishkin 1970: 25–6). But knowledge and discussions about Socrates were not confined to written texts only: in Baghdad salons were held where the philosopher was a frequent topic of conversation (Taufi, Ṣadāqah 28, 15). Considering the broad range of interest that Socrates was able to capture in the medieval Arab world, the intensity of his eminence is indeed impressive. Certainly it is not surprising that philosophers, historians, and geographers would have known of him through translated texts of Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists. However, it is truly a marvel that poets, mystics, linguists, hadith scholars, and other nonphilosophers would also have been so well acquainted with the sage.

It seems that in medieval Arabic culture there was a stock of wise sayings that served both groups and individuals by means of its items’ ascriptions to different famous personalities. We thus find sayings that are recorded as belonging to both Socrates (‘Āmirī, Sa’īdaḥ 84, 9) and Luqman (a Quranic non-Arab sage, appearing at Quran 31:12–13, for example), King David, and the Caliph ‘Umar. If, indeed, beyond faithfulness to direct translations from the Greek, the historical person to whom a given saying or anecdote is secondary, the choice of Socrates for this kind of literature can perhaps be explained by didactic objectives. He was chosen because of his fame for combining philosophy and ethics, theory and practice. This combination might have struck a chord by its similarity to the Prophet’s personality. However, just as plausible an explanation can be found in the considerable challenge Islam faced for quite some time after its inception – from Christianity on the one hand and from Muslims of weaker faith on the other. These groups seem to have attempted to promote their religious causes with the help of foreign sages. No wonder, therefore, that the earliest Arabic authorities who quoted and referred to Socrates were al-Kindi, the early philosopher, Mu’tazilite (Ivry 1974: ch. 3), and Ḥunain, a master translator and Christian apologist in a latent conflict with Islam (see e.g. Haddad 1975: 292–302).
Socrates was Syrian (shami) according to one report (Ibn al-Qifṭi: 198, 10) and a northern Greek of Syrian origin (Ibn Juljul 30, 11) according to another. He was born in Athens (Fulutarkhūs 141, 1) or in another town, Anisbah (perhaps a misspelling of Athens), to his father Sophroniscus (Shahrastānī: 278, 19). In the Arabic texts his name is usually written as Suqrāṭ, but in some cases his full name is spelt out, namely Socrates in Arabic transliteration (Ibn-al Muqaffa', Mantiq 50, 11). According to a variety of authors, the name carries a meaning in Greek, on which they are not unanimous. However, the most commonly occurring suggestions are ‘the infallibly just’ (Mubashshīr 82, 6), ‘the holder of health’ (probably a combination of the Greek sos and krates) (Ibn al-Nadīm 245, 20), and ‘the one adorned with wisdom’ (quoted by Rosenthal 1940: 73).

The consensus among Arab authors was that Socrates was principally a wise person, if not the wisest. As such he belonged to the Company of the Seven, the ‘pillars of wisdom’ (Ibn al-Qifṭi 15, 5), i.e. the Greek sages (Shahrastānī 253, 14), along with Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximenes, Empedocles, Pythagoras, and Plato – or according to another version, the Five, with Anaxagoras and Anaximenes omitted. As reported in a very traditional Arabic style, the saj (rhyed prose), Socrates was extremely savvy when it came to the hearts of men, and his influence on people’s minds and intellects was like that of the purest water in the midday heat (Mantiq I. 557).

Several authors suggest that Socrates lived during the reign of Artaxerxes, also known in Arabic as Artashast or Long-Hands Ardashīr (Ibn al-Nadīm 245, 20). An attempt at the most precise time definition was endeavored by al-Birūnī who placed his year of birth in coincidence with the third year of that king’s reign (Birūnī, al-Qānuqīn, I.156, 3), the year 5067 from the creation of the world. Agapius preferred a span within the reign of Darius (Agapius 89, 5). In a similar way, Socrates’ date of death was open to just as much speculation: according to the historians of the West, Socrates was killed at the time of Ardashīr, the son of Dara the son of Ardashīr, the son of Korresh (Cyrus), the first among the Sassanian kings; which also corresponded to the time when the Greek alphabet reached 24 letters (Birūnī, Tahlib, 134, 10).

In the Arabicization of Socrates many important details were omitted from the philosopher’s character, views, and activities, e.g. his political involvement, as referred to by Xenophon (Memorabilia 2, 7–8). In fact al-Fārābī is the only author I am aware of who explicitly mentions this aspect of the sage, allowing its inclusion in his The Philosophy of Plato; although another exception could be Ibn al-Suwar (d. 1017), who compares Socrates to Diogenes, Plato, and Aristotle, all the latter of whom he hails for participating in public life without compromising their respective philosophies (Lewin 1955: 283ff.). A very plausible reason for such an omission could be the Arabs’ unfamiliarity with and/or lack of interest in Athenian political processes and institutions. Indeed, ignorance and apathy also go a long way in explaining some rather odd information found in the Arabic material; for instance, the fact that Socrates was reported to have been brought to trial by ‘the king,’ which, in reality, was simply the title of the Athenian archon in charge of the judicial system (basileus).

In the Arab estimation perhaps the most striking feature about Socrates as a character in narrative was his attitude and conduct at the time of his own death. It
'stimulated the discussion of the problem of suicide for which Islam gave an answer which apparently differed from that of Plato and Socrates' (Rosenthal 1946: 248). Thus for some like Usamah ibn Munqiddh (d. 1188), Socrates symbolized civil bravery (Usamah 195, 13), and yet this never overshadowed the esteem for his mental qualities, of which wisdom undoubtedly took priority ('Āmirī, al-Amad, 16r13), earning him the nickname ‘The Source of Wisdom’ (Manṭiqī, 14v15). His reasoning was flawless (Mubashshir 91, 2), though it was sometimes compromised by his enigmatic Pythagorean style (Mubashshir 84, 6), which often only adumbrated in the form of perplexing yet very accurate (Shahrazūri 60r10) parables (Manṭiqī 14v16). Altogether, Socrates was extolled as a philosopher in the original sense of the word, in that he loved wisdom to a degree that caused his followers harm (Mubashshir 82, 10). Socrates’ piety (Mubashshir 91, 1) and asceticism were hailed by almost all Arab writers, including as alien a poet to the Greek tradition as Kushajīm (d. 961) (Dīwān 175). The Arab assessment of the nature of this asceticism is perhaps best apprehended within the scope of the concomitant portrayal of Socrates’ attitude towards ‘this world.’ Contrasted with the ‘world-to-come,’ this term connotes passing pleasures as opposed to real happiness, a theme not alien to the historical Socrates. This contrast is particularly emphasized by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, a politico-philosophical Ismā‘īlī group of the tenth century, which made a point that Socrates used to call people to the ‘spiritual world’ (Ikhwān IV.99). Similar reports are also made by Sufi writers, ascribing to our philosopher an interest in the improvement of the soul and a habituation in the solitude of a cave (Shahrastānī 278, 19). Nonetheless, a notable exception to this positive judgment of Socrates’ piety is to be found in al-Rāzī, who, distinguishing between a young and old Socrates with respect to asceticism, presents a somewhat cynical evaluation of his motives. According to him, Socrates’ inclination toward asceticism was due not to religious belief, but rather to a love of philosophy, and his abstinence from food is to be explained not by a love of God, but by a want of time (al-Rāzī 99, 19). In conformity with the ideal of the perfect moral sage, Socrates was held as an embodiment of magnanimity, a quality that he shared with Lysandros the Just (al-Ṣallīḥ) (Ibn Sīna 316, 6), and likewise he accured a great concern for justice: he would take care of the poor and the widow rather than accumulate riches (Tauhīdi, Akhlāq, 324, 368). Fittingly for a man who claimed the counsel of a tutelary daemon, his image was argued by ‘Abbas to have been a significant influence in the development the motif of the angel in poor man’s guise in Arabic literature (‘Abbās, Malāmīh, 150). Socrates was conceived to have combined a purity of the soul with philosophy in a manner analogous to that of Suhrāwārdī (d. 1191) (Ḫāǰī I.424, 10) – yet it was understood that this virtue did not prevent him from participating in battles according to Greek custom (al-Rāzī 99, 17). In the matter of Socrates’ family life the Arabic tradition did not significantly diverge from its sources, although elements were emphasized or constructed to approximate the Athenian sage more closely to the Arab ideal. Thus one reads without protest that Socrates’ ancestry was not of a high social status, but of course this did not trouble him (Mubashshir 100, 4). Yet later it is stated that Socrates was forced to wed, and as an exercise in patience and in expression of his misogyny (Anonymous, Bustān 43v7) he selected the worst available candidate (Mubashshir 82, 8). Nonetheless, Arabic
tradition depicts her as a loving and caring wife, and the existence of another is only once hinted at (Ibn al-Qifī 204).

Straying more radically from the original account, the Arabic sources mention two motives for the arrest of Socrates by the hand of ‘the king’ Artaxerxes (Ibn al-Nadīm 245, 20), one religious and the other personal. According to the first, he opposed the faith of the state and its priests, against whom he created public opposition, and in fear of whom Artaxerxes had him arrested (‘Āmīrī, al-Amad 6r15) (a version curiously reminiscent of Jesus in the Gospels). Still elsewhere one finds him denigrating the common beliefs about the Athenian idols (Birūnī, Tahdīhīb 18, 18) in a trial staged at an Eastern shrine (Shahrastānī 283, 1). Even more strangely, the second charge is posited in one place as the result of a conspiring aristocracy, vexed by Socrates’ opposition to poetry (Ibn al-Qifī 199, 7). However, in an alternative version related in several different anecdotes, it is Artaxerxes himself who seeks vengeance, indignant after an accidental quarrel with the sage over honor (Ibn Juljul 30, 16).

The trial of Socrates, like his arrest, plays an important role in his Arabic biographies, and is frequently set down in some detail. This is surprising in view of the fact that the Athenian judicial system was very different from that of the Islamic. For instance, whereas the Athenians had civil courts (Dunlop 1962: 82, 89), the whole concept of a trial in Islam is rooted in religion (Schacht 1964: I). Furthermore not only were the Arabic authors deprived of any relevant real-life correspondences with the Athenian legal system, it is also difficult to understand where they might have obtained any textual information to remedy this deficit as the materials would necessitate. To the best of my knowledge, no book dealing with the subject was available in an Arabic translation at the time.

However accurately his trial was received, the fate of Socrates was in accord with the Quranic paradigm of persecuted prophets (e.g. 6:34) – Muhammad obviously being excluded. On the procedural side, the Arabic sources report that the court that tried Socrates was composed of 11 judges (Mubashshir 86, 5) – one version even asserts that it was they who turned the king’s heart against the sage. It was also these judges who pointed out to him the possible damage ensuing from his continued life in Athens and the advantages that his death would bring (Ibn al-Qifī 199, 10). To substantiate the accusations 70 (Ibn Juljul 31, 8), or 11 (Ikhwān IV.99), aged witnesses were recruited.

The charges leveled against Socrates generally keep faithful to the account in the Apology, but given the philosopher’s function as an ethical model, they absorb an overwhelming Islamic slant. Thus Socrates’ original ‘heresy’ is magnified into an opposition to the astral religion and idolatry of the state (e.g. Birūnī Tahdīhīb 18, 18), calling instead for the worship of the One, the Eternal, the Creator Who made the entire world, the Wise, the Omnipotent. He further propounds what moral and social values should be adopted (Mubashshir 85, 19). Denying this accusation, Socrates simply avers that he was only scrutinizing matters as best a human being could (Ibn Rushd, Parva 78, 6). The story’s Islamic coloring hardly requires comment: God’s attributes appear here in a purely monotheistic and Islamic conception, rather similar to al-Ghazālī’s list (Ilḥāḥ 1.108) – the Creator, Omnipotent, Exclaimer of Truth, Living, Willing His Actions, Omniscient, Hearing and Seeing, Speaking, and Eternal.
Only a little later on, Socrates irrevocably secures his status as an Islamically sanctioned sage, proclaiming, ‘command to do the beneficial and forbid to do evil.’ This saying is one of the most important precepts in Islam (e.g. al-Ghazālī, Ḥiyā’ II 306–56) and is held to be of universal value, borne by all prophets at God’s bestowal (Al-Ghazālī, Ḥiyā’ II 306, 15) – it appears in the Quran several times (e.g. 3:104), and also came to be one of the Muṭāzilite five principles (see al-Khayyāʾī, Intisār 93, 3). For his proclamation of such a vehement monotheism, Jābir Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥayyān was led to qualify Socrates as ‘having neared truth’ (Jābir, Mukhtār 187, 16).

As for the charge of corrupting the young, it is recorded as relating to an innocent engagement in education between Socrates and a group of young princes, subsequently utilized by his opponents against him (al-Qazwīnī, Ruhār 382). In the Arabic account there is also a suspicion of homosexuality, understood as equally false (Anonymous, Mukhtār 100, 7).

Perhaps the best-known part of Socrates’ life concerns his death, and it enjoyed the same fame in the medieval Orient as it did in antiquity. The story is related in our tradition by two principal versions: Ibn al-Qifī and Mubashshir, both somehow different summaries of Plato’s Phaedo and Crito, with the former being closer to the Greek original than the latter. There is no telling, however, whether the paraphrases are original Arabic or translations of unknown foreign originals. A third, considerably shorter version by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, al-Qazwīnī, and Ibn Julluj focuses on the issue of Socrates’ planned escape, and in particular on the necessity of obeying the law under all circumstances (Ikhwān IV.73, 13). The Arabic sources also disagree about Socrates’ age at the time of his death: one report makes it 100 years of age (Mubashshir 91, 3); another 80 (Ibn al-Nadīm 245, 20); and yet a third, 70 (Ibn Abī Ṭalib’ī ah I.47, 13).

Though relying on Plato, the principal Arabic tradition differs in several of the details of the post-trial scene. For instance, it names Rome as the offered place of refuge instead of the Greek Thessaly (Qifī 200), and does not refer explicitly to chance as the cause for the delay in executing Socrates. Also absent is any mention of the ship that was sent annually from Athens. On the other hand, puzzlingly, the Arab author found it necessary to name the shrine to which the ship was sent, Ir’un (Qifī 199, 20), whereas the Greek text only names the island of Delos as the destination of the vessel.

And yet, the Arab authors were not always so forceful in their inclination to Islamize Socrates. In a passage which corresponds to the Greek text at 84d8ff., Socrates addresses his disciples to the effect that they should not esteem him less than they do the quānus, the bird of Apollo who knows the unknown. When it senses its death, it sings out of happiness and joy, rejoicing at its imminent reunion with its master. Socrates remarks that his own happiness in the same circumstances is no less than that of this bird (Birūnī, Tadhhib 57, 18). Furthermore, Socrates’ last words are recorded in some sources rather faithfully, and in others less so, though the discrepancies should be primarily attributed to an ignorance of Greek sacrificial customs, and perhaps only secondarily to an underestimation of its importance or a literary whitewashing. Thus, Ibn Butlan (d. 1068), a celebrated philosopher and physician clearly exempt from any suspicion of the latter motivations, remarked in our context that the cock was worshipped by the Manicheans! (Ibn Butlan 37, 27). However, more in keeping with the revisionist tendency was Ibn Ṭaraw, who refuted this conclusion on the grounds...
that the fact that Muslims sacrifice lambs does not mean they worship them (Ibn Butlan 45, 3). Still further, possibly endeavoring to avoid any suggestion of pagan elements, the version of Mubashshir ends the story not with a cock, but with a quote: ‘I entrust my soul to the keeper of sages’ souls’ (Mubashshir 90, 13).

As the paradigm of religious and ethical conduct, Socrates assumed a role in medieval Arabic literature very similar to the one he acquired in the Christian tradition. Indeed, his character expanded in accordance with his appropriation, gathering such titles as ‘prophet’ and ‘deistic philosopher,’ (or ‘metaphysician’ or ‘theologian’), which were construed as having been earlier attributed to him by the ‘Ancients’ (Balkhi, Rādī’ III.8, 1). Additionally, to this ‘prophethood’ the Arabs also added the title of law-giver, the Arabic term used in this context connoting religious laws (Tauḥiḍī, Basā’ir I.451, 14). This religious side of the philosopher is evinced in both circumstantial and contentual evidence – ‘circumstantial’ being used here to describe evidence comprising stylistic and linguistic data that attach Islamic connotations to Socrates’ activities and associated matters, while ‘contentual’ refers to the more explicit and portrayed Islamization of those activities and associated matters.

A good portion of the former type is demonstrated by the mere fact that many ‘Socratic’ sayings found in the gnomic collections are, as noted above, also ascribed to the Prophet or to other great Islamic or Islamically relevant personalities. Clearly Islamic vocabulary is unsparingly applied in this context: the words aṣmūn (idols) and shirk (polytheism) suggest a likeness between Socrates and Abraham. On top of this, the expression used by Socrates’ disciples for their request that he write down his wisdom, namely qayyid ‘ilmaka (lit., ‘tie down your knowledge’), is of a definite Islamic character (al-Kindī, Alfāz 28, 1; al-Darīmī, Muqaddimah, 43). Obviously, many other expressions are used which can easily be identified as bearing rich Islamic connotations, such as duniyā (this world), Allāh (God), or zuhd (asceticism). However, these may or may not have been chosen intentionally with Islam in mind, and the same holds for some Islamic metaphors such as the comparison of this world to a prison, which is commonly made in the hadith (Mubashshir 95, 1; Muslim 53, 1).

The contentual expression of Socrates’ often largely religious function in Arabic literature is most pronounced in the emphasis the Arab authors placed on his model as an ascetic. Certainly this attribution in itself was not originally Islamic, as the philosopher had already been viewed as such in earlier Greek literature (Lohse 1969: 47–8; Andrae 1947: 70). And yet within the Arabic tradition this ascetic element took on a uniquely Islamic hue, permitting the Athenian philosopher’s character the advantage of being regarded as more than just that of a heathen sage – he was exalted as an ideal even for Muslim holy men. Indeed, so successful was this revision that it seemed only natural to compare the celebrated al-Suhrawardi to Socrates (Haji I.424, 10). In addition, Socratic sayings and anecdotes that parallel in their contents ideas in Islamic sources also testify to this selective assimilation. Here one must also keep in mind the fact that omissions are no less evident than positive quotations, and therefore the excision of pagan expressions from Socrates’ death scene or the reworking of hymns to Apollo attributed to him reveal the methods of this purgation as well.

Nonetheless, though widespread, this revision was not universal and sometimes one does come across a contrary notion of Socrates, judged not as a proto-Islamic saint but as an atheist whose example posed a menace to Islam (Abū Ḥāyyān, Šmātā II.16, 5).
This alternative viewpoint found realization in the practice in which he, like other Greek philosophers, was used as an authority by Arab philosophers in their controversies with religious thinkers (Abū Ḥāyyān, Ḥiṣnī II.18, 15). Called the ‘apostate of his time’ and ‘the atheist of all time’ (al-Qazwīnī, Muḥājilī 52, 19), he was accused of providing anti-Islamic thinkers with philosophical disguise and justification for their heretical views (Abū Ḥāyyān, Ḥiṣnī II.16, 5), which included, among other things, a denial of the authority of religion on the grounds that it consisted of manmade rules and vain inventions (Ghazālī, Tahāfūt 5, 2). As part of the ‘opposition,’ Socrates was even literally demonized by being counted amongst the ranks of the Djinn (Majrīfī, Risālah 429, 5)! Although Socrates’ eminence in the Islamic world stemmed firstly from his conceived embodiment of ethical ideality, it should not be thought that he was largely dismissed as a theoretical philosopher, for it was the esteem in which what were believed to be his philosophical ideas were held that served as the final prop to secure him his position as the ‘top and first philosopher’ (Ya‘qūbī, Ta‘rīkh I.134, 1), the ‘father and master of the philosophers’ (Jābir. Mukhtār 389, 3), or the ‘fountainhead of philosophy’ (Shahrāzūrī 57r3). In fact it is reported that it was his views, as well as his leading of the Pythagorean school after the death of Pythagoras, that earned him Plato as a disciple (Qīfī 19, 19) after the latter became disappointed with the Heraclitean school (Qīfī 20, 4ff.).

Extracting these ‘views’ from the attributed sayings, one is confronted by a monotheistic Socrates, an ‘enlightened thinker,’ expounding a hodgepodge of Neoplatonic, mystical, alchemical, and orthodox Islamic doctrines. He was classified either as a member of the group of Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, and the dualists – in opposition to the school of Plato and Aristotle (al-Rāzī, al-Muhassal 84, 4), or counted amongst the ‘divine philosophers’ (metaphysicians), distinguished from the philosophers of nature, namely the Pre-Socratics (Stern 1960: 29; 33). According to another source, Socrates belonged to the same school as Plato and Aristotle (Qīfī 50, 19), and metaphysics was his primary field of interest (‘Āmīrī, Amad 6r14).

He tied the world to God (Balkhi, al-Bādī I.139, 6) (sometimes referred to as ‘Intellect’ [Fulūtarkhus 158, 4]) from which it emanates in Neoplatonic terms (Shahrastānī 281, 3), and proposed a world constructed of two double strata, the realm of meaning and the realm of Forms (Suhrāwardī 231, 15), in which the principal components were God, Substance, and Form. Also, it must be kept in mind that in the Arab construal metaphysics was strongly connected with theology, and thus Socrates adopted this intellectual sphere as well; in fact, some of the titles of the writings ascribed to him often suggest a religious content (see below). Besides metaphysics, he was also engaged in mathematics, logic, physics, alchemy, and politics (Haji 172/1).

Yet, Socrates’ most outstanding philosophical contributions were in the field of ethics (Ya‘qūbī, Ta‘rīkh I.134, 6), for he was not only considered to have been a brilliant theorist, but was also extolled for having exercised moral virtue in the form of asceticism – in order to attain final felicity – and in kind conduct towards other people and creatures (al-Tauhīdī, Akhlāq 328). In an interesting divergence from accepted knowledge, Abu Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 950) presents a dynamic image of the philosopher, according to which he only reached this celebrated position in the later part of his life, preceding it with a normal life.
Renowned in his own time as much as posthumously, Socrates was said to have gathered 12,000 pupils (Mubashshir 90, 16) or, alternatively, only 70. Among his teachers were Pythagoras (Sā'id 23, 1); Archelaus (Shahrastānī 278, 19) (who only taught Socrates physics [al-Mas'ūdī, al-Tanjīh 104, 19]); Timotheus, or Timaeus (Mubashshir 82, 15), and Luqmān, whom he also met directly (Ḥājī III.91/4). If this résumé is not impressive enough, the Arab authors also numbered the majestic company of Pythagoras (Ḥājī I.72, 1), Empedocles (Suhrawardī 221, 15), Plato (Ḥājī I.72, 1), Aristotle, Leucippus, Meno (Ibn Sinā 74, 13), Critias, Thrasymachus (Ibn Sinā 225, 5), and Archigenes (Ibn al-Nadīm 260, 4) among his friends and associates.

Adhering to their inherited tradition, the Arabic authors claimed that Socrates refrained deliberately from writing, a stance also taken by the Prophet. Yet in spite of this conclusion, bibliographers mention a number of titles ascribed to the philosopher: A Treatise about Politics (perhaps Plato’s Republic); A Treatise about Proper Conduct (Ibn al-Nadīm 245, 21); Law-giving (Usūmah 437, 15) (perhaps Plato’s Laws); Religion (or Law – Sunnah) and Philosophy; and Reproof of the Soul (Ibn abi Usaib’ah I.49, 26).

**Teachings**

In his philosophical teachings Socrates’s took ‘the middle course,’ exemplified by the argument between him and Thrasymachus in the Republic (Ibn Sinā 225, 5). On the other hand another source relates that he used to ‘coerce’ into actuality almost everything in potentia (Jābir, Maṣḥūḥātī fol. 1v10), a practice disliked by Plato who instead advocated treating things like ‘the soul of a dead man [going] through the eye of a needle’ (Jābir, ibid. 11v4). The grand expositor of a Neoplatonic metaphysics, Socrates proclaimed a First Existent from which all the other existents drew their being; a process realized through the emanation of the Good from it to them, including the perfect city and its ruler (Māṣūdī, Tanbīh 101–4). Furthermore, in keeping with his Neoplatonic roots, the Arabic Socrates insisted that the principles of all things were three: Active Cause which is God; Essence which is the primary substratum for all being; and the Forms which are the elements of bodies (Ibn al-Jauzī, Talhīs 46, 13).

In addition to abstract considerations, Socrates gave specific directives to humans with regard to God, which are very similar to Islamic ones. For instance, he insisted that one should fear, love, and please Him (Mubashshir 85, 9), realize that He is one’s protector, and avoid giving in to lusts (Ḥunain, Nawādir 67, 17). Besides an unswerving faith in God, Socrates advocated prophecy (Balkhī, Bad’ III.8, 1).

In the Arabic language the word dahr (time), which is sometimes replaced by zamān, connotes along with its purely temporal meaning the sense of fate and eternity, hinting at a need for a resolution of pessimism and futility in the hopeless struggle against its flux. Thus as an ‘otherworldly’ metaphysician, the Arabic Socrates denounces time as constantly renewing itself (Ḥunain, Nawādir 70, 18) while annihilating everything else (Ḥunain, Musreī 18, 27), and thus never affected in its own essence (Ḥunain, Nawādir 71, 5). It is an intractable and invincible foe, keeping its promise to no one; it is an oppressor and an enemy, a killer and a judge, a conqueror and an insatiable dog (Ḥunain, Nawādir Siqrat 23r16). An intriguer (Ḥunain, Musreī 22, 8) full of vicissitudes
(Mubashshir 112, 3) and calamities (Mubashshir 120, 12), its only inherently positive quality is that eventually it acts equally upon all (Mubashshir 112, 11) and will finally return one to one’s primal element (Ibn abi Usai‘ah I.49, 13). Thus, the Arabic Socrates admonishes that one should regard Time negatively (Ḥunain, Musrei 22, 11) and mistrustfully (Ḥunain, Musrei 22, 4), but with perseverance (Ḥunain, Musrei 19, 2).

This world is depicted negatively by Socrates for its temporality, opposition to the world-to-come, transience (a characteristic also pointed out in the Quran, e.g. 57:20), and treachery (Mubashshir 104, 15). In its more specific relationship to the human condition it is associated with sensual pleasures and apparent advantages, namely position, wealth, and comfort (Anonymous, Muktār 112, 14). However, the seemingly desirable things of this world are, in reality, detrimental as they cause evil (Anonymous, ‘Umūn 38v6) and veil God from one. (Ḥunain, Nawādir 67, 19). For it is this world that diverts one from that which is incorruptible, toying with one’s destiny (Ibn ‘Aqnin 104, 11). Therefore one should make all effort to resist its harmful influences, since even cultivating it imparts toil while in it and, far worse, misery after having left it (Mubashshir 98, 1). To him who loves the world, it is a prison, but to him who renounces it, a paradise (Mubashshir 95, 1).

Nevertheless, Socrates assures one that there is a positive side to this world: it is a transit to the world-to-come for the road to which provisions must be prepared (Mubashshir 96, 3). Though this is hardly grounds for an unabashed optimism, one can find hope in the fact that the sufferings in this world will be rewarded in the next (Ḥunain, Nawādir 67, 5). And since while here one must act, proper actions are prescribed in two categories: those that will gain one entry into Paradise and those that will bring one posthumous praise (Mubashshir 98, 5). Along the way, one must be prepared for the inevitable calamities and misfortunes that this world provides (Mubashshir 117, 12), adopting a position of equanimity (Ḥunain, Musrei 19, 29), or at least of moderation (Mubashshir 96, 5). Yet the loftiest path during this unhappy sojourn is to suffice with the necessary little and occupy oneself with the pursuit of wisdom (Mubashshir 103, 19).

Socrates, like several other well-known Greek philosophers, was alleged to have maintained the creation of the world by God, whose existence was infinite neither in space, because it is actual rather than potential (Fārābī, Fīsūl 19, 15), nor in time. God consisted of the world of meaning, further divided into the world of Divine Sovereignty and the world of the Intellects; and the world of Forms, which in turn, was divided into corporeal Forms, i.e. the world of the spheres and elements, and the spiritual Forms, also called the world of suspended images (Suhrawardī 231, 15).

On the issue of cosmology we are told that Socrates differed from his teacher Pythagoras (ʿĀmirī, Amad 8v16); and more specifically, on that of the interchangeability of the elements he held views similar to those of Anaximenes (Ṭauḥīdī, Muqabasat 271, 15). He maintained, according to an Arab author who quotes Plutarch, that there are three principles: the efficient cause or agent, which is God; Substance, which is the first substratum; and Form, which is a bodiless essence. For the Arabs Socrates’ interest in cosmology was consonant with his involvement in alchemy, a discipline which he received from God and in which he voiced his views on the Balance, water, stones, and the Elixir. This first idea, the Balance, seems to have entailed a somewhat
vague ‘equilibrium’ between the genera and nature (Jābir, Mukhtār 159, 10), perhaps contrived in an attempt at quantifying such diverse fields of knowledge as physics, Neoplatonism, medicine (Jābir, Mukhtār 263, 3), and contemporary Ismāʿīlī religious ideas. Just as mysteriously, the philosophical notion of water Socrates propounded extended beyond its traditional role, splintering into several kinds, such as ‘sharp,’ ‘flying,’ and ‘the water of life,’ distilled from certain stones arranged in a certain manner (Jābir, Mukhtār 389, 3).

The terms used in Arabic for ethics as it was exercised by Socrates were either ṭahdhīb al-akhlāq or riyādat al-nafs (training of the soul), both loaded with heavy Islamic connotations. Along such lines, the ethical character of Socrates was pruned and cultivated according to Islamic ethical ideals. Thus Socrates is affirmed to have taken a great interest in social justice, while opposing the amassing of property. He regarded the ability to know right from wrong as a fundamental characteristic of any human being, lacking which a person could not be fit to belong to society. The virtues incumbent upon every intelligent agent to follow and uphold (Ḥunain, Nawādir 66, 15) were serviced by innocence and culpability, through the employment of one’s bodily organs (Mubashshir 85, 12). He proclaimed moral ignorance as tantamount to death (Ḥunain, Mā dhakarahu 17v4), and, therefore, preached that one ought to do what was right (Mubashshir 119, 10), even against contempt or disapproval (Mubashshir 116, 8).

Although Socrates was renowned for the nobility of his character even amongst his contemporaries, in Arabic literature this virtue is, of course, hailed in the context of its function within Islamic spiritual purification. Hence Socrates testifies that the possession of a good character absolves one from sin (Ḥunain, Musrei 22, 21) and conceals it, as well as invites a flood of other good qualities and situations, such as love, friendship (Ḥunain, Musrei 21, 16), and peace. Likewise, the justice so enthralling to Plato’s Socrates in the Republic is poeticized by the Islamic Socrates as God’s balance (Kindi, Alfaż 31, 8) by which He composed the world (Miskawaihi, Hikmah 213, 15); the most beautiful of ornaments (Usamah 432, 12), adhering to which results in salvation (Kindi, Alfaż 30, 6). It would seem that an integral part of this adherence was acquiescence in truth, which Socrates directly entwines with aesthetics in stating that the most beautiful person is he who knows the truth best (Mubashshir 105, 12). Any bearer of it is to be welcome, since truth raises him to its own greatness (Mubashshir 120, 7), being what distinguishes the freeman from the slave (Mubashshir 110, 12).

Very much in accordance with the Greek tradition, the Arabic Socrates praises the human intellect as identical to God (Fuluṭarkhūs 163, 13), with Whom it shares simplicity, originality, and true existence (Fuluṭarkhūs 159) – though he emphasizes that this lofty status is bestowed at His grace (Ḥunain, Musrei 18, 31). Quite contrarily but still in a way that is not un-Greek, Socrates elsewhere states that the intellect, obviously separate from God, is unable to describe His true essence (Sharastani 279, 4). Yet in still other places, the intellect is defined as the result of the influence of God upon the soul (Birūnī, Tahdhīb 65, 4), and as such, a guarantee of one’s right action (Mubashshir 116, 17) as well as a safety from perdition. Not unexpectedly, the intellect’s relation to the body is mostly conceived as one of opposition unless it manages to rise above it in rulership (Miskawaihi, Hikmah 281, 19) – such cooperation is presented as ideal (Usāmah 440, 16).
Following upon these assessments, the Arabs, like their Greek predecessors, had no problem creating a strong bond between the intellect and ethics. Thus Socrates’ character, as presented in the full range of inherited sources, needed little tidying, merely development. In one account Socrates asserts that the intelligent person shall do nothing base, although he will not be free from self-doubts (Mubashshir 119, 16) – a core Platonic principle given further psychological qualification. Following upon this statement, then, is a list of prescriptions, proceeding in a more uniquely Islamic manner: he is oblivious to property; his demands and expectations from others do not exceed those from himself (Mubashshir 112, 19); his speech is civilized (Mubashshir 120, 5), but with the fool he should speak as a physician speaks with a patient (Mubashshir 103, 14). Conversely, the ignorant person is recognizable by his constant laughter, anger (Mubashshir 102, 1), and mistakes (Miskawaihi Ḥikmah 282, 1).

Knowledge (‘ilm, ma’rifah), a central theme throughout Islamic literature, is analogous to government in a land or to the spirit presiding over the body (Anonymous, Bustān 12r12), and makes all other virtues depend from it (‘Āmirī, Sū‘ādah 412, 4). It trumps understanding, perception, insight, learning one’s lesson, patience, reticence, and calling one’s soul to account respectively (Mubashshir 119, 2); true knowledge consists in identifying the causes of things (Mubashshir 106, 20). Thus, acquiring knowledge and conducting oneself according to it is the best policy for the happy person (Usāmah 438, 14), who must gain it through experience ( Hunain, Musrei 20, 14). However, according to one view, God is the only possible object of human knowledge (Mubashshir 85, 5).

The tool for the acquisition of knowledge is education and learning, which according to Socrates is but recollection (Ibn Sīnā 74, 13). On a purely anecdotal level, to the question of whether he was not ashamed to study at an old age, Socrates answered that being ignorant at such an age was even more shameful (Miskawaihi, Ḥikmah 211, 12). It is therefore beneficial in this quest for one to frequent the company of the knowledgeable, as they are also the guides to virtue (Mubashshir 116, 13); but the learner himself must be studious, patient, and of an understanding mind ( Hunain, Musrei 23, 11). The process of education, Socrates argued, is like agriculture, where the teacher is the farmer, the student is the field, and study is water.

The virtue of wisdom, Socrates exhorts, has an indelible ethical efficacy in that it is essential for the soul’s ascension to the Good (Kīndī, Alfaţ 30, 7). It is inseparable from modesty, self-contempt ( Hunain, Nawādir 54v5), and a calm indifference towards praise and blame (Sharazı 58v6), realizable only through a noble reticence (Ibn ‘Aqīn 80, 16). Moreover, it finds its antagonism in the degeneracy of drinking, amusement (Mubashshir 122, 1), greed ( Hunain, Musrei 19, 21), and other self-destructive lusts ( Shahrastānī 282, 13). Wisdom, as Socrates more determinately defines it, is a rational evaluation of the possible future outcomes of present events, and afterwards taking steps in accordance with one’s conclusions ( Hunain, Musrei 20, 13) while never losing sight of the long-term goal of salvation (Mubashshir 119, 5). It has a strong metaphysical aspect in that it is ‘the light of nature’s essence’ (Mubashshir 111, 19), and the tool for escaping death (Kīndī, Alfaţ 30, 8). Psychologically speaking, wisdom is the medicine of the soul, the wise person being its healer (Sharazı 65v12). It is pleasant (Sharazı 58r5), better than wealth in that it is incorruptible, and exclusive of such worldly attachments (‘Āmirī, Sū‘ādah 60, 6).
Continuing, Socrates explains that the flip side of virtue, vice, is rendered by ignorantly ascribing incompatible properties to certain particulars (‘Askarī, Diwān II.93, 8). Further, he laments that since vice is only discernible through its consequences, it often catches one unaware (Ibn al-Mutazz 86, 11). Compounding this with the fact that vice stems from some deficiency in the soul, its detection may in some cases be possible only by the sage-psychiatrist (Mubashshir 124, 1). Indeed such a man can also help one to remove the root of all internal evils (Shahrastānī 281, 12), but, nonetheless, as long as one is evil one is to be regarded as of the living dead (Hunain, Musreī 19, 4), devoid of all goodness (Hunain, Mā Ḍhakaraḥu 17v5). Moreover, because of this state, such a man deserves no pardon, even if his sins are committed unwittingly (Āmīrī, Saʿūdah 84, 3).

Man’s desire stands in obverse relation to his greatness (Mubashshir 113, 6), an idea Socrates inscribed on his seal: ‘He whose passions overpower his intellect is disgraced’ (Ibn abi, Usābiʿīyah 1.47, 18). Moreover he who prefers desires to his intellect is both blameworthy and regretful, in such a way that failing to overpower his body, he makes it his grave (Āmīrī, Saʿūdah 84, 4). Some desires, however, are laudable, although Socrates does not specify which (Mubashshir 102, 7). Still most, e.g. intoxication, greed, lying, and anger, are destructive to the soul and ought to be done away with (Mubashshir 102, 3), or, more realistically, should at least not extend beyond one’s reach (Miskawaihi, Hikmah 346, 8), and there should be no exaggeration in pursuing them (Mubashshir 113, 14).

Anger is shunned by both religion and law (Mubashshir 124, 9), since it dehumanizes (Anonymous, Bustūn 20r11) and is among the symptoms of the death of the soul (Anonymous, Mukhtār 106, 1). Upon analysis anger is reducible to mere self-punishment, a detriment to manly and other virtues (Āmīrī, Saʿūdah 131, 12) which often, unfortunately, proves intractable (Miskawaihi, Tahdhīb 195, 1). Nevertheless, when it is subordinated, this feat is affected by means of reticence, the panacea for desires (Kindī, Alfaš 30, 23). Free-floating anger Socrates dubs ‘boldness,’ and explains it as resulting from the soul’s failure to consider the consequences of its actions (Usāmah 438, 15). Similarly, impropriety according to Socrates displays one’s faults (Mubashshir 110, 16), disturbs one’s life, and harms one’s reputation (Anonymous, Fusūl 39v7). He thus urges that one govern one’s manners, the most important kind of self-government (Mubashshir 124, 19).

Arabic Socrates paid much heed to social matters and in this context voiced his views on man and woman, both as a philosopher and from personal experience. He believed that women were evil (Hunain, Musreī 21, 25) and abhorred the good. Also, being the antithesis of wisdom, they desired to dominate men (Hunain, Musreī 21, 29) in assisting Satan (Ibn ‘Aqnīn 130, 11). Moreover, Socrates declared that women incited revenge (Mubashshir 104, 3), and on the whole were inclined to prostitution (Ibn Kamal Basha, Rujuʿ 85, 31). For these reasons mere contact with women results either in imprisonment or death (Ibn ‘Aqnīn 132, 11); Socrates himself was said to have escaped from the danger of their treacheries. Invoking metaphors to his aid, Socrates (Mubashshir 115, 6) likens woman to a fire (Mubashshir 114, 3), to the oleander tree which kills in spite of its beauty (Hunain, Musreī 22, 29), to a hunter (Āmīrī, Saʿūdah 84, 9) or to a trap (Mubashshir 114, 1), to a scorpion (Ibn ‘Aqnīn 132, 17), a snake (Anonymous, Bustūn 4v12), or an arrow (Hunain, Musreī 20, 5).
Threatened by such a host of dangers, Socrates urges the aspiring sage to avoid women as much as possible (Hunain, Musrei 22, 24) and adds further that even in exceptional moments, they should never be obeyed (Mubashshir 114, 11). Hence, more concretely, marriage is a fate worse than death (Sharrazuri 73v1), analogous to a fisherman’s net wherein those outside it wish to enter and those inside to escape (Mubashshir 109, 3).

The issue of friends and friendship is salient in the Socratic teaching as it is in Arabic literature on the whole. Whereas romantic love is understood as a sort of madness (Mughulmai 31, 11), friendship, a basic factor in human life, is defined by Socrates as a ‘mutual affection of the hearts with a mutual harmony of the spirits’ (Anonymous, Fu’l 39v6). More valuable than gold, it is the duty of every father to teach its value to his children (Miskawaihi, Tahdhiib 156, 10), so that they form friendships capable of withstanding any trial (Sharrazuri 70v1). Such constant inculcation is indeed necessary, as Socrates himself is once presented as offending the sacred bonds by accepting a disciple’s gift (Mubashshir 101, 18). In choosing a candidate for one’s friendship, suitability is evidenced by the prospect’s conduct with his parents, brothers, and family; his personal qualities such as gratitude; his attitude toward pleasure, duty, property, and power (Miskawaihi, Tahdhiib 158, 9); as well as his self-appreciation (Mubashshir 119, 18).

Socrates admonishes that when building a friendship one must not act with haste or be overly zealous (Majri, Ghiyath 414, 18), nor should one conduct it from too close a range (Hunain, Musrei 18, 21). On the other hand the friend should be treated well and praised frequently, because praise is part of the foundation of friendship (Mubashshir 99, 7). Another ineluctable part is faith, and the faithful friend prevents one from erring (Hunain, Nuwaidir Saqrat 44r1), points out to one one’s weaknesses (Anonymous, Mukihtar 92, 7), and puts one before oneself for moral scrutiny (Mubashshir 113, 17). However this attitude must be reciprocal since otherwise one may be led to low-mindedness or even self-degradation (Usamah 464, 14). Developing this point further, Socrates encourages that one exercise flexibility with one’s friends (Mubashshir 118, 8) and only reproach them after one’s anger subsides (Mubashshir 99, 3), if at all, as criticism might be self-damaging (Miskawaihi, Tahdhiib 158, 9; cf. Themistius, On Friendship 56). When a friendship must be put to the test, this should be done when the friend enjoys superiority and sovereignty rather than inferiority and weakness; applying this method the conclusions are thus more accurate (’Amiri, Sa’adah 131, 13). Summing up, Socrates insists that as a friend one must not be too tough, demanding (Shahristani 281, 18), or book-keepingly (Majri, Ghiyath 415, 4), but rather one should be trustful, as trust is the basis of being human (Majri, Ghiyath 415, 4). Indeed, antagonistic to the virtues of trust and faith stands betrayal, one of the five annihilators of the soul (Ghazi, Tibr 111, 16).

Beyond relations between individuals, the domain of politics and society at large did not escape Socrates’ notice: indeed, even in his own case, once the possibility to live within the state was withdrawn, death was preferred to the inhuman life that would follow (Ibn Rushd, Be’ir 37, 31). Like the historical Socrates, his Arabic heir firmly asserts that civic life requires obedience to the law, which is universal (Mubashshir 99,
and beneficial to the multitude (Shahrastānī 282, 4) – religious law being to religion as medicine is to the body and psychology is to the soul (Usamah 432, 15). Furthermore, as custodian of the state for whom religion and intellect are of essence (Ghazālī, Tibr 76, 11), it is the duty of the king to educate his subjects (Mubashshir 97, 13) and to repel injustice (Usamah 432, 12) and evil, while promoting the reign of their opposites (Usamah 438, 7). To competently handle such duties the king must train himself to forbear the ignorance and bad character of others (‘Āmīrī, Sa‘ādah 284, 5). However, on the other side of the line of authority, Socrates urged ordinary people to avoid serving kings if they wished to adhere to truth. Along these lines he counsels that if one wants to befriend men of power one should do so before the latter assume of face, for otherwise one could be viewed as a flatterer (Mubashshir 123, 5). Also, for the purely practical reason of preserving one’s safety he also advises that one should beware of appearing to behave more truthfully than the king himself (Mubashshir 104, 18).

As both metaphysician and ethicist Socrates spoke broadly on issues that fall under what was referred to in both medieval Arab culture and Greek thought as ‘psychology,’ or the philosophical treatment of the soul. Not surprisingly he was said to have made ethics logically depend from his psychological doctrines (Miskawaihī, Tahdhib 87, 9), and put the relations between the soul, the body, Nature, Intellect, and God in hierarchical order (‘Āmīrī, al Amad 9a5), similar to the three Plotinian hypostases (e.g. Enneads IV.3, 27, 5; 12, etc.). In accordance with his above-mentioned metaphysical pessimism towards the material world, Socrates held the soul properly opposed to the body in its quest to arrive at its proper place after death (Birūnī, Tahdhib 65, 2). Also, inviting a great disparity with Islamic beliefs, some Arab authors maintained that Socrates believed in the transmigration of souls (Ḥunain, Musrei 23, 5), which he demonstrated by his theory of recollection (Birūnī, Tahdhib 43, 9). More specifically, this espousal was construed as having placed Socrates within the ranks of the pre-Islamic ‘twelfth erroneous sect’ of some philosophers (Al-Isfarāīnī: Ṭabṣīr 120, 1), who also contended that only impure souls underwent this process (‘Āmīrī: al Amad 8v20).

Socrates conceived of the soul as equivalent to the All (Mubashshir 93, 16) and sharing in a natural affinity with other souls (Mubashshir 93, 5). Despite such a regal metaphysical attribution, he nonetheless balanced this view by declaring that souls are ignorant of their futures – this was also his explanation for why they did not fly away immediately (Ḥunain, Nawādir 73, 7). As a good Neoplatonist the Arabic Socrates taught that pure souls achieve salvation for themselves and for others (Mubashshir 93, 3) and were recognizable by their acceptance of the truth (Mubashshir 92, 14), their stable goals (Taḥḥīdī, Inta’ II.47, 6), and by their being in concert with their bodies (Ḥunain, Nawādir Suqārī 22v5). Affecting this salvation in the individual was the rational soul, crowning the microcosmic psychic hierarchy and defined as a substance endowed with faculties and senses (Shahrastānī 282, 18), but not to be confused with the intellect (Risālah, in Badawī 1974: 313, 6). In order for the rational soul to ascend to its goal, the good (Mubashshir 125, 4), it must employ the body (Taḥḥīdī, Inta’ II.34, 12); the particular object which establishes the soul’s relative status through the latter’s identification with it (‘Āmīrī, Sa‘ādah 60, 4).

Socrates’ psychology is so strongly connected with death, the afterlife, and resurrection that to a certain degree it comports with Islamic teachings. He was, however,
accused by some of having held unorthodox views on a portion of these issues (Sā‘īd 23, 6), but not on the immortality of the soul (Ibn ‘Arabī, Bulghārī 195a3). Detailing his doctrine of the soul’s perdurability, he argued that the soul was a substance different from the body, standing to be rewarded or punished for its deeds done in this world (Bīrūnī, Tahdhib 65, 5). Alternatively Socrates proposed that the awakening of the rational soul meant the termination of its appetitive counterpart (Ḥunain, Musreī 18, 24).

Socrates’ welcoming attitude towards death, dramatized in his cell, was shared by Islamic writers such as al-Ghazālī (Ihya‘ IV.496, 13); and his conception of the soul’s prebirth existence was known to the Arabs (Shahristānī 280, 17). He likened death to a prolonged sleep (Ibn Ḥindī 87, 14), as the closest yet most hateful thing to man (Ḥunain, Musreī 23, 6) but his inevitable fate (Miskawāhi, Hikmah 265, 14). Nonetheless, he did admit it a positive side as a means to the world-to-come and eternal life (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 120, 7). Additionally, he hails it for liberating one from one’s body (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 120, 21), tiredness (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 116, 7), passions, sins (Mubashshīr 106, 3), and enemies (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 116, 20) – from this world in general (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 114, 23) – and rejoices in the thought that it rids the world of its sinners (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 122, 6). In acting equally towards all, death compensates for life’s unjust discriminations (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 122, 14), and reconnects one with one’s departed loved ones (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 118, 7). In sum, death for the righteous is preferable to life in this world (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 120, 18), a belief that in itself makes death easier to bear (Ibn ‘Aqīnīn 118, 9). One’s right policy towards death is, therefore, a proud despising of it rather than fear, as fear constitutes death’s bitterness (Kindī, Alcibiades 29, 13). Furthermore, killing oneself voluntarily, which is different from prohibited suicide (Bīrūnī, Tahdhib 481), will turn natural death into life (Kindī, Alfaṣ 30, 2).

Conclusions

The image of Socrates in the medieval Arab world was one of a ‘super sage’ and prophet, drawn in part from the fact that he addressed almost all aspects of life. This image had a positive aspect and a negative one: as a ‘super sage’ rather than a mere philosopher, he did not play a role in the conflict between faith and philosophy; as a ‘prophet,’ however, he could indeed pose a threat, and was attacked as such. He, along with other Greek philosophers, served as a weapon in the internal controversies of Islam as well as those between Muslims and Christians.

Socrates’ personality and the means of portraying it prior to Islam struck more than one major chord in Islamic tradition: he conveniently served as a model person like the Prophet himself, and anecdotes and quotations like the hadith, rather than theoretical treatises, fit the purpose of giving authoritative meaning to doctrine within the context of such an ideal figure. This exemplary image has not ceased to date: as late as 1998 a Musical Play by Mansour Rahbani, The Last Days of Socrates, was staged in Beirut ‘as a protest against modern tyranny and injustice’; and in a series of articles in the celebrated London newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat. Socrates is mentioned as a seeker of truth (Sept. 17, 2000) and a warrior for freedom (March 25, 2001).
Note

1 This chapter relies strongly on two books that I have published: Socrates in Mediaeval Arabic Literature, vol. X in the series Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science, eds. H. Daiber and D. Pingree (Jerusalem: Leiden, 1991) and Socrates Arabus: Life and Teachings (Jerusalem, 1995). In the chapter only one reference will be provided for units of information. Complete parallels can be found in the above books.

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